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ABSTRACT

Noting that Washington Irving's classic tale of the Headless Horseman has lately become a Halloween favorite, this lesson plan helps students explore the artistry that helped make Irving the United States' first literary master, and ponders the mystery of what happened to Ichabod Crane. Its 4 lessons seek to make students able to: (1) summarize the plot of "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow"; (2) adapt passages for a contemporary audience; (3) analyze the characterization of Ichabod Crane and Brom Bones; and (4) offer an imaginative response to the conclusion. Intended for grades 6-8, the plan offers suggestions on preparing to teach this lesson. It also notes subject areas covered (American Fiction/Literature/Language Arts), time required to complete the lesson, skills used and taught in the lesson, and lists of the standards developed by professional associations or governments that are related to the lesson. Activities to extend the lesson and further resources conclude the lesson plan. (SR)

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Washington Irving
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SEARCH EDSITEMENT

The Legend of Sleepy Hollow

Introduction

Washington Irving's tale of the Headless Horseman has become a Halloween classic, although few Americans celebrated that holiday when the story was new. In this unit, students explore the artistry that helped make Irving our nation's first literary master and ponder the mystery that now haunts every Halloween -- What happened to Ichabod Crane?

Guiding Question:

- How does "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" still capture the imagination of readers today?

Learning Objectives

After completing this lesson, students will be able to:

- Summarize the plot of "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow."
- Adapt passages of "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" for a contemporary audience.
- Analyze the characterization of Ichabod Crane and Brom Bones in "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow."
- Offer an imaginative response to the conclusion of "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow."

Preparing to Teach This Lesson

1 This lesson plan consists of four learning activities that you can use together as a unit or adapt separately to your curricular needs.

Literature & Language Arts: American

Literature & Language Arts: Fiction

6-8

Four to five class periods

analyzing plot and character
analyzing verbal style
close reading
interpreting a literary text
imaginative writing

Curriculum Standards for Social Studies

1. Culture
   c. explain and give examples of how language, literature, the arts, architecture, other artifacts, traditions, beliefs, values, and behaviors contribute to the development and transmission of culture.
4. Individual Development and

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2 Review the suggested activities, then download and duplicate any online materials you will need. If desired, you can bookmark specific web pages so that students can access relevant online materials directly. (See Resource Links for a guide to locating online materials.)

3 For background on Washington Irving and additional teaching resources on "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," visit these websites accessible through The Center for Liberal Arts on EDSITEment:

- Biographical sketch of Washington Irving from A Student's History of American Literature at Bibliomania.
- Radio adaptation of "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" (RealAudio).
- Clips from Tim Burton's Sleepy Hollow (1999 -- Rated R), in which Ichabod Crane becomes an early 19th century New York City detective.
- Interactive annotated text of "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," which includes links to web pages on the Hudson Valley setting of the story and short definitions of difficult words. (Unfortunately, some student annotators of this online text have added comments that make it unsuitable for elementary school use.)

Suggested Activ

4 Ask students to share what they already know about Washington Irving's "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," which may be familiar to them from the film adaptation by Tim Burton or the animated version by Walt Disney. Then have students read the story, first published in 1820, which is available online in an easy-to-read PDF edition. (You will need Adobe Acrobat to read the PDF edition and will be asked automatically to register online for the free "key" required to open this file.) Ask students to compare Irving's short story (one of the first examples of this genre) with the tale that has become part of American folklore. Consider, for example:

- The proportions of humor and terror in Irving's telling. The "Legend" has gained a reputation as a ghost story over the years, but Irving shaped it as a comic tale of self-delusion leading to its own downfall. Ask students to point out "the scary parts" of the story. How scary are they in Irving's hands?
- The prominence of the Headless Horseman in the original story.
  Hollywood has made this frightening apparition the signature image of the tale, yet Irving presents him as a creature of hearsay and foolish superstition who remains indistinct even when he finally appears. Ask students to point out descriptions of the Headless Horseman and evaluate his

Identity

- **d.** relate such factors as physical endowment and capabilities, learning, motivation, personality, perception, and behavior to individual development.
- **f.** identify and describe the influence of perception, attitudes, values, and beliefs on personal identity.
- **g.** identify and interpret examples of stereotyping, conformity, and altruism.

5. Individuals, Groups, and Institutions

- **a.** demonstrate an understanding of concepts such as role, status, and social class in describing the interactions of individuals and social groups.

NCTE/IRA List of Standards for the English Language Arts

1. Students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works. (more)
2. Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience. (more)
3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).

impact on the narrative.

- The underlying dynamics of Irving's plot.
  At its core, the "Legend" is a fabliaux-like tale of rival suitors, with a suggestion that their affections are being manipulated by the lovely whom they both desire. And as in a fabliaux, appetite is the driving force behind the plot, in this case the appetites of Ichabod Crane -- for food, wealth, admiration, and romance. Ask students to summarize the story's plot from this point of view, as a chain of events set in motion by the ambitions of Ichabod Crane. Then examine the part suspense plays in the narrative. To what extent does this indispensable ingredient for a mystery advance the plot?

5 Though the story Irving tells in "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" will be familiar to most students, many of the words he uses will likely puzzle them. In the first paragraph, for example, words like *cove, denominate, implore, inveterate, propensity, vouch, advert,* and *repose* may frustrate young readers. Take advantage of the print-out format that online texts make possible by having students underline unfamiliar words as they read "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow." Then divide the class into small groups, assigning a section of the story to each group, and have students use context clues and dictionaries to produce an annotated edition of the tale.

- When students have shared and compared definitions, explore the contribution of hard and far-fetched words to Irving's style by having students re-write short passages of the story in the simpler, more direct manner a writer might use today. Talk about what is lost and gained in these transformations. To what extent does Irving's use of unusual terms serve to characterize the narrator of his story, creating an impression of voice and personality? To what extent does his style serve to keep readers at a distance from the story, inviting us to watch it unfold as informed observers rather than become emotionally involved?
- For added insight into the effects Irving achieves through his literate, leisurely style, have students listen to the radio adaptation of "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" available online through EDSITEment. (You will need the RealAudio plug-in to listen to this audio file.) What happens to the story when its language is streamlined for the ear and its action reduced to its most dramatic elements?

6 The two main characters of "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," Ichabod Crane and his nemesis, Brom Bones, are often assumed to be figures of American folklore, although they are in fact Irving's original creations. Have students examine the techniques Irving uses to create the impression that these characters have a life of their own outside his story.

- Compare Irving's descriptions of the two characters' physical appearance (Crane in paragraph 8, Brom Bones in paragraph 26). Call students' attention to the way Irving assembles a picture of Ichabod Crane out of separate elements, enhancing his ungainliness, while he presents Brom Bones in broader strokes, conveying an impression of energy and strength. Ask students to illustrate these passages to help them analyze Irving's literary technique, which produces a sharply drawn portrait on the one hand and a catalog of personal qualities on the other.

(more)

4. Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes. (more)
5. Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes. (more)
6. Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and nonprint texts. (more)
8. Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge. (more)
9. Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles. (more)
11. Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities. (more)
12. Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information). (more)

View your state's standards

- Compare the social frame Irving sets around his two main characters when they are introduced into the story. We see Ichabod Crane lording it over his pupils, accommodating the rustic families that take him in, showing off his singing talents and education for impressionable ladies, and trading superstitious tales with the local gossips (paragraphs 9-19). By contrast, Brom Bones comes into the story as the chief candidate for Katrina's love, the dominating figure in the community, and the leader of a pack of fun-loving friends (paragraph 26). Ask students how these associations play on our prejudices and color our opinions about the two characters.
- Explore the contrasting values these two characters represent. Students might recognize them as those arch-rivals of youth culture, the nerd and the jock, but Ichabod and Brom can also be interpreted in terms of city culture and country life, the virtues of art and the vitality of nature, imagination and reality, wish and will, brains and brawn, or the outsider and the native son. Have students generate further points of contrast between these two characters in order to see how Irving has set them up as almost archetypal opposites across a range of value systems.
- Finally, explore the students' response to these two characters. Point out that to some degree "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" is the story of an underdog who goes up against the local hero. Do we pull for the underdog in this contest or enjoy the spectacle of his defeat? Do we side with the local hero or find ourselves drawn to the comical figure who will be his victim? Talk about the ways Irving manipulates our sympathies in his story, shading from ridicule of Ichabod toward a more affectionate point of view by letting us see more and more of the story through his eyes (for example, in paragraph 22, paragraphs 38 and 56, and at the storyÕs climax in paragraphs 61-65).

7 Irving ends "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" with an air of mystery, leaving us to wonder if the Headless Horseman really did carry away Ichabod Crane. Few students, however, will doubt that the Headless Horseman was Brom Bones in disguise, and might consider Irving's conclusion an exercise in empty atmospherics. Yet there is a real mystery left unsolved at the end of the story: What happened to Ichabod Crane?

- After we see him knocked from his horse by a flying pumpkin, Ichabod vanishes without a trace, though Irving gives us a rumor that he went on to become a lawyer and eventually a judge (paragraph 69). To sharpen students' analysis of IchabodÕs character, ask them to evaluate this rumor: How plausible is it? How well does it square with what they know about Ichabod Crane?
- Have students brainstorm their own solutions to Irving's mystery, imagining what could have happened to a character like Crane. Point out that his story is set "some thirty years" before its publication in 1820 (paragraph 8). What was happening in the United States at that time? What famous Americans might he have encountered? What historic events might he have witnessed? Encourage students to speculate boldly on the later career of this literary character, then have each student write a story about some episode in Ichabod Crane's life after "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" or an imaginary obituary summing up what he made of himself

after his fateful encounter with his own worst fears.

Extending the Lesson

Critics consider Washington Irving a pioneer of American humor, the first to capture the democratic spirit of ridicule that we later find in the work of Mark Twain. You can explore this aspect of American literature further with the EDSITEment lesson plan, "Mark Twain and American Humor," which focuses on Twain's story, "The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County," another tale of the outsider outsmarted by native wit, as well as stories by George Washington Harris and Nathaniel Hawthorne.

Resource Links

Center for the Liberal Arts

- English
  - Literature
    - Literary Resources on the Net (Jack Lynch)
      - American Literature (Daniel Anderson, Texas)
        - Interactive Text: The Legend of Sleepy Hollow
    - PAL: Perspectives in American Literature
      - Early Nineteenth Century and Romanticism
        - Washington Irving
    - English Literature on the Web
      - American Authors
        - Washington Irving Teaching Resources
          - Biographical sketch of Washington Irving
          - PDF: The Legend of Sleepy Hollow
          - Audio: The Legend of Sleepy Hollow
          - Film: Tim Burton's Sleepy Hollow (1999)